

VZCZCXRO1428
PP RUEHDBU RUEHIK RUEHYG
DE RUEHBUL #5778/01 3450718
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 110718Z DEC 06
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4765
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 0353
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 3389
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 3367
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RHMFIUU/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

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SIPDIS

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DEPT FOR SCA/FO, SCA/A, S/CR, S/CT, SCA/PAB, EUR/RPM
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE
NSC FOR AHARRIMAN
OSD FOR KIMMETT
CENTCOM FOR CG CFC-A, CG CJTF-76, AND POLAD
RELEASABLE TO NATO/ISAF/AUS/NZ

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: PRT/QAL-E NOW: SPANISH ROAD CONSTRUCTION UPDATE

REF: KABUL 5666

THIS CABLE SUPERCEDES KABUL 5667

11. (U) SUMMARY: The Spanish Agency for International Cooperation (AECI) is working on a road between the provincial capital, Qal-e Now, and the Sabsak Pass, on the border between Herat and Badghis Provinces. The Spaniards plan to complete work on the first 30 kilometers by the end of the year and hope to complete the project in 2007. This road will greatly facilitate vital commerce and travel between Qal-e Now and Herat. In spite of earlier speculation linking the Spanish project to planning for the National Ring Road, the road they are constructing will remain a secondary, unpaved road, and will not/not be a part of the National Ring Road. The GOA is satisfied with this arrangement, in light of recent news that the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has pledged up to \$100 million for construction of that north-west National Ring Road segment, which is now projected along a separate alignment well to the north of Qal-e Now. This new ADB pledge is significant because it resolves the funding issue for the last, unassigned portion of the National Ring Road, thus fulfilling a major U.S. strategic objective. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) With no good roads to adjacent provinces, Qal-e Now has suffered relative economic isolation. Travel between Qal-e Now and Herat, a distance of 150 kilometers, currently takes between six and 10 hours depending on weather conditions. When the Spanish PRT was established in May 2005, the AECI identified an improved road linking Herat and Qal-e Now as a prerequisite to provincial development. Spanish engineers designed a 58 kilometer road from Qal-e Now to the Sabsak Pass on and adjacent to the existing dirt road.

13. (U) The new road starts at the AECI-constructed bridge connecting Qal-e Now to its new airstrip (reftel) and continues southward toward Herat. The first two phases of the road are relatively flat, but the final phase will require the construction of a route across the 2,500 meter-high Sabsak pass. The road follows a seasonal river

bed and passes through several villages and small communities. Expansion of the dirt road to a seven meter-wide gravel road with a one-foot layer of sub-base, two meters of improved shoulder, proper embankments, and drainage culverts has required AECI to work closely with locals to compensate those who lose property because of the expansion.

¶4. (U) Flooding and a lack of data on historic rainfall and runoff patterns is a key problem faced by Spanish engineers. The head of the project thinks "it is impossible to know how high to build a bridge if you simply don't know how high the seasonal flood waters rise." To solve this problem the Spanish have opted to construct a series of "bridge-fords" designed to withstand floodwaters by allowing the water to pass over the bridge without damaging the structure.

¶5. (U) The majority of the 56 kilometers will be gravel, but AECI is considering cementing the upper parts of the road in the Sabsak Pass where weather conditions would quickly deteriorate a road made of compacted materials or asphalt. Local government and citizens alike often voice the hope that the Spanish will someday pave the entire road, but AECI has no plans to construct asphalt roads in the province. According to AECI head Pablo Yuste, the decision not to pave the road was taken for both economic and developmental reasons. He explained that not only was the cost of paving the road prohibitive, but the eventual cost of repairing the road would also limit the province's ability to maintaining the vital trade route. (CFC-A Note: Paving would decrease the risk of improvised explosive devices (IEDs). While not currently a problem in this area, this could become more important should the insurgency move into the western

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provinces. End Note.). AECI plans to donate machinery currently being used to construct the airport to the provincial government. These machines will enable it not only to maintain the new road but construct additional roads with little or no outside assistance.

¶6. COMMENT: (SBU) There has been some confusion regarding how the Spanish road fits into the GOA's plans for developing a nation-wide road network. At one point Deputy Minister of Public Works, Dr. Mohammed Wali Rasooli, informed AECI that their road should become part of the Ring Road project and asked them to build the road according to Ring Road specifications. At a later date, Dr. Rasooli decided that the Ring Road would pass well north of Qal-e Now and asked AECI to downgrade its project and provide the excess funding to Rasooli's ministry. Currently AECI, which considers this to be a secondary road with an alignment that is not conducive to the Ring Road standards, is continuing with its original construction plans while the GOA has recorded a major success in lining up a new funding pledge from the Asian Development Bank to build the projected National Ring Road segment along a new alignment considerably to the north of Qal-e Now.

¶7. (SBU) The first 30 kilometers of the road should be completed on schedule before the end of the year, and AECI hopes to complete the entire project in 2007. (CFC-A Comment: This is an ambitious schedule considering design, survey, and construction requirements. End Comment.). When completed, the road will greatly reduce travel time to Herat, especially during winter months. It is hard to over-state the importance of a secure and reliable transportation route to the future development of what has been one of Afghanistan's most remote and underdeveloped provinces. END COMMENT.
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